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United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Council the report of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, submitted pursuant to Council decision 2018/207.

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Report of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition*

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

I. Background

1. In April 1977, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Sub-Committee on Nutrition (SCN), eventually renamed the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN). The original ECOSOC mandate (1977) remains valid: focusing on policy coherence and advocacy for nutrition at global level. The main areas of responsibility are to: (i) keep under review the overall direction, scale, coherence and impact of the UN System response to nutrition problems; (ii) be point of convergence to harmonize UN policies and activities; (iii) provide initiative in development and harmonization of concepts, policies, strategies and programs in UN System; and (iv) appraise experience and progress towards the achievement of objectives in order to be better able to develop guidelines for mutually supporting action at UN interagency and country levels.

II. Evolution and achievements since 2010

2. Significant achievements for UNSCN in the past decade include: (i) the production of the annual World Nutrition Report, which developed into the Global Nutrition Report; (ii) support to the development and early operations of the SUN Movement; (iii) the production of UNSCN Briefs on key thematic issues, including an influential one on SDG indicators; (iv) support to the implementation of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2); and (v) the coordination of many activities to promote research and improvements on nutrition. At the request of the communities it served, UNSCN also established time-bound communities of practice to advance the analysis and discussion of key nutrition topics.

3. In 2016, the UNSCN secretariat was moved back from WHO (Geneva) to FAO (Rome) and Michel Mordasini, IFAD Vice-President was elected as Chair. The year also marked the first of a renewed UNSCN as a UN members-only committee and the adoption of a new Strategic Plan for the period 2016–2020, coinciding with the first five years of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025), hereafter Nutrition Decade. In 2017, UNSCN commissioned the paper Global Governance for Nutrition to provide a better understanding of the significantly evolved nutrition landscape and the role of UNSCN therein. The UNSCN discussion paper "By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition and leave no one behind" went one step further and drew the links between the 2030 Agenda, the global nutrition targets set by the World Health Assembly (WHA), the follow-up to ICN2, and the actions and relevant actors working on nutrition together under the Nutrition Decade.

* The present report is being issued without formal editing.

4. The continual increase in membership (currently 13 official members and two observers[1]) demonstrates the multidisciplinary nature of nutrition and the growing number of UN agencies considering nutrition in their policies and programming. UNSCN builds on the mandate and strengths of its members, and works according to a principle of subsidiarity, ensuring maximum impact while avoiding duplication of efforts. The UNSCN Steering Committee consists of FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, UNSCN Chair and Secretariat.

5. UNSCN works in accordance with its four Strategic Objectives (SOs) as formulated in its Strategic Plan (2016–2020):

(a) SO1 — Maximize UN Policy Coherence and Advocacy on Nutrition

(b) SO2 — Support Consistent and Accountable Delivery by the UN System

(c) SO3 — Explore New and Emerging Nutrition Related Issues

(d) SO4 — Promote Knowledge Sharing Across the UN System And Beyond

6. UNSCN applies a consistent approach guided by the human rights framework, particularly the right to adequate food and nutrition and it acknowledges that gender equality and realization of women's rights are central to achieve nutrition goals. Human rights should be respected, protected and promoted at all times, including in fragile and emergency contexts.

III. Nutrition landscape and governance

7. The years 2007/2008 marked a turning point in history for nutrition: the food price crisis intensified attention on food security and nutrition worldwide. A High-Level Task force was temporarily established under the guidance of the UN Secretary General, ensuring appropriate and timely action across the UN System during and after the crisis. The CFS was reformed allowing a more diverse range of stakeholders to pro-actively engage ad participate. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement gained traction thanks to considerable support from both within the UN and from outside the UN.

8. In this somewhat crowded nutrition space, UNSCN maintained its unique comparative advantage as the only interagency committee that:

(a) Is universal in scope, not limited to specific groups or categories of countries;

(b) Advocates a human-rights based approach to nutrition;

(c) Concentrates on the UN system;

(d) Works on all forms of malnutrition;

[1] Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN-Women, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO) and Bioversity International as an associate member. The CFS Secretariat and the UN Network for SUN/REACH Secretariat are observers.

(e) Promotes intersectoral analysis and action;

(f) Focuses on global issues that relate to local realities and needs.

9. The extensive work of UNSCN member agencies in the area of nutrition is adequately captured in the biennial Progress Report to UN General Assembly (UNGA) of the Implementation of the Nutrition Decade submitted by the co-conveners, WHO and FAO. The information in this report focuses on the convening role of the UNSCN supported by its secretariat.

IV. Under the umbrella of the Nutrition Decade

10. UNGA Resolution 70/259 called on UNSCN's coordinating function to support the Nutrition Decade. As part of the informal secretariat of the Nutrition Decade, UNSCN was instrumental in the progress made in 2017, supporting FAO and WHO in their leading and convening role. This was done through: (i) online consultations to develop the Nutrition Decade's Work Programme and (ii) Nutrition Decade related products, such as the biennial Progress Report to UNGA of the Implementation of the Nutrition Decade and the ICN2 Resource Guide, which serves to advise countries on how to define, submit and report on SMART commitments to facilitate the commitment-making process. UNSCN elicited concrete commitments from its members considering their specific characteristics and comparative advantages and highlighted the latest through the webpages dedicated to the Nutrition Decade. The 2017 publication UNSCN News 42 — A Spotlight on the Nutrition Decade was dedicated to showcasing examples of what a Nutrition Decade looks like in practice. UNSCN News 42 — A Spotlight on the Nutrition Decade was downloaded more than 46,000 times, complementing the distribution of a modest number of hard-copies during major events.

11. The universality of the malnutrition problem requires a comprehensive outlook to identify solutions moving forward. For the Nutrition Decade to be a success, the dots need to be connected between the traditional and non-traditional nutrition actors and between the conversations happening across sectors.

V. Strategic Objective 1 — Maximize UN policy coherence and advocacy on nutrition

Actions under this theme are in support of Nutrition Decade Action Area "Strengthened governance and accountability for nutrition".[2]

12. The global nutrition targets as agreed by the World Health Assembly in 2012, the global Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) targets and the recommendations of the ICN2 in 2014, provide a clear direction for action to fight all forms of malnutrition. These have been woven into the fabric of the SDGs, where they should be seen as crosscutting and essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The Nutrition Decade proclaimed by the UNGA in April 2016 amplifies this message by

[2] The Nutrition Decade's Work Programme embraces six cross-cutting and connected action areas derived from the Framework for Action (FfA) recommendations, namely: (i) sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets; (ii) Aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions; (iii) Social protection and nutrition education; (iv) Trade and investment for improved nutrition; (v) Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages; and (vi) Strengthened governance and accountability for nutrition.

calling for ten years of accelerated, coordinated, global action on nutrition so that the above targets can be reached. This action brought nutrition to the highest political agenda within the UN system.

13. To ensure the full integration of nutrition into the various processes and intergovernmental platforms, UNSCN engagement in 2017 encompassed activities with the following bodies and governing activities to promote policy coherence and advocacy on nutrition across the UN system.

(a) Participated in the World Health Assembly and the FAO Council to link agriculture and health to shape food environments for better nutritional outcomes.

(b) Served as part of the Advisory Group of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and as a member of most of its Technical Task Teams (CFS TTT), specifically active in the CFS TTT on Nutrition. In this capacity UNSCN co-organised a series of events highlighting the impact of food systems on nutrition including country examples of opportunities and challenges. These events also served to link other UNSCN activities, such as publication of discussion papers and events beyond Rome, with the platform CFS offers.

(c) Worked to promote a shared understanding of how issues related to women's economic empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition are evolving, and ensure that the outcomes are considered in the preparation for the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62).

(d) Made a submission to the HLPF on the fundamental role of nutrition as a maker of development and an essential accelerator to achieve all SDGs. It emphasised areas that require urgent attention, the guidance required by the High Level Political Forum to move the agenda forward and made policy recommendations to accelerate progress in poverty eradication from a human right-based approach. As a member of the Expert Group Meeting for Nutrition to review SDG2 convened under the auspices of ECOSOC (July 2017), UNSCN worked to secure the centrality of nutrition in achieving SDG2. In 2018, UNSCN continues to contribute to the work of the HLPF, lifting the profile of nutrition within the SDGs.

(e) An important step for UNSCN in 2017 was the reestablishment of the formal annual reporting lines to ECOSOC, reaffirming UNSCN's full commitment to accountability towards Member States.

VI. Strategic Objective 2 — Support consistent and accountable delivery by the UN system

Actions under this theme are in support of the Nutrition Decade Action Area "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets", "Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages" and "Strengthen governance and accountability for nutrition". Other Action Areas have and will be covered in coming years.

14. Coherent policies need to be followed by consistent delivery on the ground to achieve the global nutrition targets. External pressures cause the greatest stress on those who are most vulnerable, and that this needs to be considered when designing and implementing policies.

15. One major achievement in 2017 was the release of UNSCN's Guidance Note on Integration of Nutrition in the UNDAF. This Guidance Note ensures that UN Country

Teams are better equipped to integrate nutrition into their planning and programming, and to reflect nutrition-related risks and opportunities in the Common Country Analysis. It incorporates the latest global evidence, commitments, policy guidelines and related developments, and it draws from lessons learned in earlier guidance notes, as well as from experiences from the SUN Movement. Ongoing work will be to disseminate the information widely, which will require additional attention in 2018 due to UN reforms. UNSCN also started mapping lessons learned from country level nutrition interventions to analyse how global level guidance is being implemented at country level — work that continues into 2018.

16. UNSCN serves to reinforce the humanitarian side of the nutrition agenda by encouraging members to operationalise key recommendations featured in the Guidance Note for UN Humanitarian Coordinators — Integrated multisectoral nutrition actions to achieve global and national nutrition-related SDG targets, particularly in fragile and conflict affected states[3] released summer 2017 and sent to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. As a follow-up to the Compact, the humanitarian field now contains an analysis of the needs and priorities of nutrition in the response plans. Ongoing work in 2018 will be to disseminate the information widely, including through a joint letter by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and UNDP Administrator to the Resident Coordinators to promote collective nutrition outcomes.

17. UNSCN works to translate the selected policy options and strategies into country-specific commitments for action, in line with the 2030 Agenda and various regional strategic frameworks. Clear common principles should guide the process of developing and implementing local strategies, which can then be applied to specific contexts with an aim at developing locally specific and pragmatic strategies. The work of the UNSCN in this area is carried out in close collaboration with the SUN UN Network Secretariat, which is mobilizing UN action in SUN Countries.

VII. Strategic Objective 3 — Explore new and emerging nutrition related issues

Actions under this theme in support of the first and second Strategic Objectives and in support of the Nutrition Decade Action Areas.

18. For the Nutrition Decade to achieve longstanding results, the global community needs to be forward thinking and adaptive to the constantly evolving nutrition landscape. UNSCN brings together new and emerging insights from several sources to fuel debates contributing to policy convergence and coherence on, for example, climate change and nutrition. UNSCN convenes its members to gather the latest guidance and insights of their work leading to joint statements that guide country level actions, such as on severe acute malnutrition (SAM)/moderate acute malnutrition (MAM).

Climate change and sustainability

Actions under this theme are in support of the Nutrition Decade Action Area "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets".

19. The global food system — in other words, the types of foods produced and how they are processed, traded, retailed and marketed — is failing to provide adequate,

[3] Guidance Note for UN Humanitarian Coordinators was prepared by the UNSCN, OCHA, The Global Nutrition Cluster and the SUN Movement.

safe, diversified and nutrient-rich food for all in a sustainable way. Transforming food systems, so that they are sustainable and promote healthy diets is vital to improving nutrition. This can only be realized when quality production is able to address micronutrient deficiencies, is geared towards lowering the consumption of ultraprocessed foods that are too high in sugar, salt and fat and is produced in a way that promote biodiversity and respects the environment. ICN2 called for "strengthening sustainable food systems". The Nutrition Decade takes that one step further by placing its support for the improvement of diet quality through sustainable food systems at the centre of global action.

20. In 2017, UNSCN:

(a) Released the publication Sustainable Diets for Healthy People and a Healthy Planet. The findings of which were presented at the ECOSOC Coordination and Management Meeting Panel on Climate change and Nutrition (April), at the 40th Session of FAO Conference (July), at the technical workshop Sustainable Diets in the Context of Sustainable Food Systems (July), at the International Symposium on Food Security and Nutrition in the Age of Climate Change (September), at IUNS 21st International Congress of Nutrition (October), at the Bonn 2017 UN Climate Change Conference (November), and at the Zero Hunger event held at the Italian Parliament (November).

(b) Remained active in the Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Programme of the 10-Year Framework for Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) to integrate nutrition and NCDs in upcoming 10YFP SFS project proposals, making the link between sustainable production and sustainable and healthy consumption.

(c) In the context of the CFS, UNSCN hosted several events highlighting the potential of food systems to work better for nutrition and the need for investments to be channelled accordingly.

(d) Conducted a literature review of the potential of Neglected and Underutilised Species for nutrition and barriers to their uptake. The findings of this research also served as inputs to the HLPE and CFS work on Policy Coherence on Sustainable Forestry for Food Security and Nutrition.

(e) Building on UNSCN Statements The double burden of malnutrition: a challenge for cities worldwide (2006) and Nutrition security of urban populations (2012), UNSCN continued its work focusing on the unique specificities of urban and peri-urban environments and the many challenges that they face in achieving food and nutrition security. Members worked to connect the various discussions at events from the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (January 2016) to the Food Security and Nutrition in an Urbanizing World (June), EAT Stockholm Food Forum 2017 (June), through the Expert Group Meeting on Progress in Achieving SDGs, with a specific focus on implementation of SDG2 (June) and World Food Day 2017, which focused on "Change the future of migration. Invest in food security and rural development".

Noncommunicable diseases

Actions under this theme are in support of the Nutrition Decade Action Area "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets" and "Aligned health systems, providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions".

21. Unhealthy diets are among the top risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease, and account for about one quarter of all deaths.[4] NCDs are the leading global cause of mortality, and are responsible for 70% of deaths worldwide — equivalent to 40 million people.[5] While NCDs are a significant burden on all countries, they are rising disproportionately among low- and lower-middle-income countries, where nearly half of all premature deaths occur from NCDs.[6] Strong links exist between nutrition and NCDs risk factors, including physical activity and the food environment, which is currently impacting heavily on rising trends of overweight and obesity. The food environment can be understood as the space in which consumers make their dietary choices and is heavily influenced by a large range of actors and factors (trade, labelling, prices, processing etc.).

22. To counter the trends, UNCSN convened the nutrition work of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Noncommunicable Diseases and developed its workplan and deliverables. In 2017, the group developed a Terms of Reference focusing on improving policy coherence, and is dedicated to have an initial focus on obesity issues in school aged children in support of the ECHO Implementation Plan.[7] The group also intends to integrate nutrition considerations in other areas of the IATF (i.e. environment, physical activity). The working group contributes to the implementation of the NCD action plan (2013–2020) and works according to the principles established in the NCD workplan. Going forward, the IATF and UNSCN secretariats will join forces in 2018 specifically to support the third High-level Meeting on the prevention and control of NCDs being organised by the UNGA in 2018.

23. The activities outlined above (as well as the event mentioned under Strategic Objective 1 — Maximize UN policy coherence and advocacy on nutrition) enabled UNSCN members to speak with one voice and to present coherent views on nutrition. It also helped to gather insights on the new research developments in nutrition and the issues that could be taken on board by various groups of academia, knowledge centres or even by the UNSCN.

Childhood nutrition

Actions under this theme are in support of the Nutrition Decade Action Area "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets" and "Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages".

24. Research has highlighted the importance of intergenerational factors shaped by a mother's nutritional status; the importance of the first '1000 days' of pregnancy and early childhood for shaping health and development throughout the lifecourse.[11] Maternal health and infant feeding together are greatly influenced by access to health systems, particularly the provision of suitable care and advice directly within the

[4] http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94384/1/9789241506236_eng.pdf?ua=1.

[5] http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/.

[6] WHO NCD Progress Monitor, 2017.

[7] The WHO Ending Childhood Obesity Implementation Plan guides policymakers on the recommended actions to prevent and treat childhood obesity. http://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/en/.

community and access to safe birthing in medical facilities. The sanitation environment is critically important in ensuring that immune status and dietary absorption are not impeded by infection, disease and other chronic gut problems.

25. In 2017, UNSCN:

(a) Produced Schools as a System to Improve Nutrition drawing from the expert capacities of the technical staff of eight UNSCN members (FAO, IAEA, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and Bioversity International/IFPRI) with input from outside the UN family, including from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Global Child Nutrition Foundation, Partnership for Child Development, World Bank and Catholic Relief Services. The paper was first presented at the 2017 Global Child Nutrition Forum, featured at the *School, Food and Nutrition: Lessons learned and new perspectives for the Brazil* in Johannesburg (November) and again at the event *International Symposium Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition* in Brazil (November). The paper serves as input for the development of technical frameworks for school food programs, led by the Rome based agencies FAO, IFAD and WFP.

(b) Organised discussion and brainstorming events at the 3rd International Congress Hidden Hunger (March).

(c) Organised more than 15 workshops ranging from the latest on tracking and monitoring tools to ways to address all forms of malnutrition throughout the lifecycle at IUNS 21st International Congress of Nutrition (October). UNSCN also organized the symposium The Changing Nutrition Landscape: Implications for Research. The preliminary findings of the upcoming UNSCN discussion paper *Treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition and Moderate Acute Malnutrition* were presented at the WHO/UNICEF Symposium.

Women's empowerment

Actions under this theme are crosscutting in support of all the Nutrition Decade Action Areas.

26. Unlocking the full potential of entire populations is only possible when women, who are most vulnerable to malnutrition, are well nourished and are fully supported by their communities. An empowered woman who has access to and control over resources can contribute to healthy societies and can influence the extent to which resources, specifically food, are allocated in the household benefiting the health and nutrition outcomes of the entire family. The realization of women's rights and their full participation in society should be at the centre of all strategies.

27. To help realize this potential, UNSCN engaged in the following activities:

(a) Worked to address the equity and non-discrimination drivers of good nutrition, specifically those affecting women and girls. Awareness raising events and messaging focused around International Women's Day 2017 (March), the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW, March) and the Forum on Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition (September) to promote a shared understanding of how issues related to women's economic empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition are evolving.

(b) Actively engaged with UNSCN member UN-Women to prepare for CSW62.

VIII. Strategic Objective 4 — Promote knowledge sharing across the UN system and beyond

Actions under this theme are covered in support of the first and second Strategic Objectives.

28. To keep pace with this evolution, a website restructure in November 2016 now allows for a user-friendly and state-of-the-art "one-stop-shop" for nutrition information. Its content-rich online archiving system underwent a major overhaul in 2017 to guarantee that the substantial volume of text captured throughout UNSCN's 40-year history is easily accessible. Nutrition news and information sharing has also been ramped up through E-Alerts and Quarterly Updates to UNSCN subscribers, and to a wider audience through social media.

29. To ensure the greatest level of uptake, UNSCN translates its discussion papers into all six official UN languages. Contributions to online discussions and to its Call for Contributions are also welcome in all UN languages.

30. As part of its knowledge sharing role, UNSCN has also facilitated the following online communities of practice: (i) AREA Community of Practice for 2017, (ii) The Agriculture-Nutrition Community of Practice, (iii) The Nutrition and Climate Change E-group and (iv) Nutrition and Noncommunicable Chronic Diseases — e-discussion Forum.

IX. Conclusions

31. UNSCN has worked to maximize policy coherence among UN agencies and initiate global guidelines for nutrition policies and programming in line with global frameworks and its Strategic Objectives. Reviews of its members' policies helped identify synergies and ways to optimize available resources. Engaging with various processes and platforms, UNSCN elevated the importance of addressing the nutrition challenge as key to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular its interlinkages to the other SDGs. It has provided guidance on integration on nutrition in the UNDAF to ensure delivery at the country level.

32. UNSCN seeks to further promote policy coherence and consistent delivery across the UN system. To do so, it will further expand the UNSCN membership base to enable a more comprehensive approach to nutrition. UNSCN will also deepen its engagement with the governing bodies of its members. It will continue to highlight the interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda, and contribute to the work of the HLPF. It will work with the IATF to ensure strong outcomes, which include the nutrition aspects, at the third High-level Meeting on the prevention and control of NCDs being organised by the UNGA in 2018.